

# HR

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Employee  
Assistance  
Program

# FrontLine Supervisor

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A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **We have outside speakers on wellness topics during the year. One of them is a psychiatrist in the community. He appears very competent. Several employees have seen him for help. I also recommended him to an employee who is now doing well. Should I refer to the EAP instead?**

■ **I read where half the workforce in America is stressed about the economy. Many people are losing money. A counselor isn't going to replace it. So what can the EAP do?**

■ **We have an employee being treated for a gambling problem after forging a document and stealing**

**You should refer to** the employee assistance program as the source of help for those struggling with workplace behavioral problems. To recommend the psychiatrist presumes you can vouch for his competence and also that you have an accurate understanding of your employee's personal problems, or at least enough of an understanding to determine that the psychiatrist is the best choice. When you act in the capacity of referral agent, you are beyond the scope of your duties. This adds to your liability as well as to that of your agency, and it is less efficient. When the EA professional meets with an employee, an assessment is made in order to determine the most appropriate referrals. The assessment will take into account the employee's work-related concerns as well as personal issues including family, substance abuse, financial and legal as well as mental and physical health problems. Based on the assessment, the EA professional will recommend a comprehensive treatment plan.

**Losing a lot of money** or a percentage of one's net worth is enormously stressful. Although no one can replace the losses associated with the market downfall, do not underestimate the value of listening, support, and professional assessment as critical first steps in limiting the mental health effects of the financial crisis. Once this occurs, a person can turn to the task of working toward adapting to the new reality with a plan to cope with financial limitations or to rebuild financial resources. People cope with crisis, fear, and panic differently, but if other personal problems coexist with these states, then such an event can magnify feelings of desperation and hopelessness. Like the death of a loved one, a great loss can trigger depression and other health effects. The EAP will work diligently to help your employee survive the loss and live for a hopeful future.

**Unfortunately, there is** no way to determine if or when a recovering person with any addictive illness will relapse. Your decision to retain your employee and invest in the treatment and recovery process does not preclude this risk. Still, the likelihood of success is high with good follow

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**funds. We decided not to terminate him because of his outstanding past performance. Our concern is follow-up treatment and preventing a relapse. How will we know if there is going to be a relapse, so we can prevent it?**

up treatment. Relapse won't necessarily occur, but on the road to true recovery, it may happen. For the person in recovery, reinstituting the recovery program quickly is the intervention of choice. Your anxiety and concern are understandable because you don't know what a relapse will mean if it happens. It is crucial that you stay focused on job performance and take appropriate action based on performance issues. Effective recovery programs after treatment work to dramatically decrease risk of relapse. The personal growth employees frequently achieve in recovery can turn them into terrific workers. There are many employers who will tell you that you made the right choice. Hopefully, your workplace will have that experience in this situation.

■ **We encourage employees to report co-workers whose behavior appears dangerous or who appear to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. To date, it's never happened. What can make a difference in this area?**

**Unfortunately, coworkers enable** just like family members do. Very few want to be the snitch or the one who "caused" the termination of a peer. It is far easier to cover up, protect, do the co-worker's job, lie, or even take the blame for the co-worker's performance problems. There have been instances where enablers *chose to be fired* for a performance incident caused by an addicted worker instead of pointing them out. A comprehensive drug free workplace policy that includes support for addicted workers often helps diminish enabling. The "social responsibility" message to report a peer has a greater chance of success when employees understand the workplace will be a supportive environment for a co-worker dealing with the disease of chemical dependency. A referral to the EAP may be helpful for employees who desire more information concerning enabling behavior.

■ **What are some of the award-winning characteristics of outstanding workplaces that include the role of the supervisor?**

**Every year, trade organizations** and journals announce winners of contests for outstanding workplaces. These winners, and semifinalists, are often cited for having effective work cultures that produce high morale and productivity. Many factors of their work cultures link directly to supervisor behavior. These include:

- Helping employees reduce bureaucratic roadblocks to personal achievement.
- Encouraging open dialogue and the debate of ideas.
- Finding ways to help employees increase their knowledge.
- Helping employees stay current about trends in their fields.
- Offering flexible work arrangements.
- Fostering open communication.
- Giving predictable feedback with ongoing follow-up that provides additional feedback prior to evaluations.
- Fostering interdepartmental teamwork and understanding.
- Mentoring.
- Involving employees in continual discussion about their career goals.
- Encouraging employee input.
- Offering formal training to improve effective group and team relationships.

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## NOTES

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